

eleven novembers by tinytaeil

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Angst, Bad Parenting, Baseball, Canon Compliant, Child Neglect, Childhood, Emotional Hurt/Comfort, Family Drama, Gaslighting, I'll add more tags as i go, Implied/Referenced Child Abuse, Mental Health Issues, Multi, Sad, Steve-centric, Teenage Drama, not completely but pretty close, through to Adulthood

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Summary:

'They fuck us up, they don't mean to, but they do.'

Tommy's mother isn't in the picture and his father is the greatest man in the world, in the eyes of exactly three people.

Carol's mother is weak and her father is pretending to be strong in the worst kind of way.

Steve's mother is trapped in a overly large house and his father is constantly leaving it, leaving them, behind.

Our parents make us, and sometimes, they fuck it up. For Tommy, Carol and Steve, they do exactly that.

1. An Early Christmas

Author's Note:

come chat to me on tumblr @backyardbarf !

1975, NOVEMBER 4TH - STEVE HARRINGTON - 9 YEARS OLD

Each branch of the pine tree, standing tall in the middle of their living room, was adorned with a bauble, hung with fairy lights and wrapped in tinsel. Beneath it lay piles of presents, neatly wrapped and tied with a ribbon, matching wrapping paper making each present blend into the other, cards stuck down atop them with sticky-tape that had been looped over itself. Next to them sat Steve, grinning brightly at the camera his mother pointed in his direction, leaning towards the presents with a childish eagerness.

Steve's father would be working through Christmas once again, his job kept him flying from state to state at every time of the year, more often than not colliding with the holiday festivities. Steve's mother had insisted on an early Christmas, adamant that her son experience the joy that should come with this time of year, albeit early.

When Steve had told his classmates of their early celebrations they'd whined, "You're family's so cool, Steve."

Tommy had grumbled, copying out his 8 times tables with a crease in his forehead, "My mum won't even let me near the presents until 6 in the morning."

"Yeah, they are cool." Steve had grinned, scratching out an incorrect answer and replacing it with Tommy's answer before dropping his pencil, taking to staring out the classroom window as he waited for his classmates to finish, dreaming of the Christmas dinner they had planned for that evening.

In the armchair across the room, Steve's father sat with a glass of scotch balancing on the armrest, his hands curled around it lightly as he watched his son scramble for the presents at his mother's

allowance. Tearing through the carefully wrapped packages with fervor, being sure to thank his mother and father at each new gift he unveiled, books, figures, magazines, and finally, a baseball bat. The initials, S.H, carved into the hilt, the old wood was near golden, polished to perfection and showing only minor signs of wear.

Steve beamed as he pulled the bat from the box his mother had hidden it in, an attempt to disguise the shape that would be all too obvious if wrapped alone. He stood up and adjusted his grip, he held the bat too firmly, his knuckles turning white and the bat moving stiffly through the air when he swung.

"Hang on," his dad interrupted, tilting his head back as he swallowed down the dregs of his scotch and rose to meet Steve in the middle of the expansive lounge room, "you're doing it wrong."

At Steve's frown, his shoulders falling and the bat colliding with the carpeted floor, his mother clicked her tongue and frowned up at Mr Harrington, "Sean," she warned, "He can do what he likes."

"Come on outside," Sean continued, moving to the front door and pushing his son along from behind, his large hand warm on his shoulder, "I'll show you how to use it."

His father pulled on his coat first before taking the bat from his son and dropping his thick winter coat into his arms, waiting by the open front door as Steve hurriedly stuffed his arms into the heavy sleeves, fighting back a grin as he rushed outside, barely giving himself enough time to step into his boots before tumbling out into the frosty winter air. His father followed at a more even pace, taking the time to bend down and tie his laces before giving the bat back to Steve.

"Alright," he started, bending down a little as Steve clutched tightly to the bat once more, choking out any flexibility, "loosen your grip a bit, you'll never do anything right if you're choking it out like that." Steve hastily let the bat droop in his hands and Sean snorted a light laugh. He placed his larger hands over Steve's and moved them to the correct positioning, his left hand facing backwards on the bottom of the bat, his right facing forwards just above it.

"That's how you should always hold it," Sean coached, uncurling

Steve's tight grip once more with gentle hands, "and that's how loosely you should hold it."

Steve, eager to please, swung the bat spinning slightly on his heel with the momentum and stumbling, falling on his side, the bat held high above his head in fear of damaging it. Sean grinned above him, waiting for his son to clamber back to his feet before carefully re-arranging his son's grip.

"You're not standing right," his father chided, moving around to the front of Steve and spinning the boy to the side, knocking at Steve's left foot until it was pointed forward while his right was pointed to the side, "You should stand with your left foot forward, bend a little at the knees, hold the bat up high, not too tight. Come on, you remember how I told you to hold it." Sean stepped back a little, out of the bats range, "And swing, follow through across your body."

Biting down on his bottom lip, Steve shifted in his position, stiff and unwilling to break the formation his father had set him in, he leaned back and swung forwards, letting his arms move across his body but remaining stock still.

"No, no," Sean moved in again, knocking at Steve's right leg with his foot, "You have to move this one when you hit, lean into it with your legs and the bat but away with your upper body."

Another awkward swing and Steve could hear his father sighing behind him, rough and frustrated, "Didn't you pay attention to how they play when the games are on T.V.?" His father asked, moving in behind him again and plucking the bat out from between his hands.

If Steve was being honest, he hadn't ever paid very much attention to the baseball games his father forced him to sit through. They were long and Steve barely understood the rules of the game but his father liked to watch them, and he liked to tell Steve about the players and what they did well, or what Steve's father could have done better if he had been in their place. Steve had never seen his father play baseball but he agrees anyway, because his father hasn't lied to him so far, and Steve doesn't see the point in doubting him. The elder man was away so often that Steve enjoyed the conversation more than the game itself, learned some of the terms and the players names and their corresponding numbers, just so he could keep up a

conversation between him and his father. If Sean Harrington ended up believing his son was an avid baseball fan, then so be it.

Sean settled into a batting position, perfectly recreating the men who stood dressed in stripped uniforms, with their stomachs rounding out the tight button up shirt, their thighs encased in the white fabric as they swayed, waiting for the pitcher to throw.

Steve's father swayed too, his loose tie swinging along with him, his coat getting caught in the wind and blowing out behind him like a cape, the button up shirt and carefully tailored pants hidden beneath, rustling and revealing Sean's lean frame. When his father's invisible pitcher set loose the ball, the man swung with an all mighty force, the bat whistling as he swung. His right leg buckled in slightly, his shoulders shifting confidently. He lifted his hand to his eyes and watched the invisible ball disappear into the setting horizon, a light whistle leaving his lips as he turned to smile at his son, his cheeks flushed a slight pink.

"That's how you do it," his father said, handing the bat back to Steve after an impressive twirl that drew a gasp from Steve. He beamed brightly, bouncing on his toes as he moved into the same position his father had just been in, desperate to replicate it, to look as incredible as his father just had, strong and powerful and in control. Sean placed his hands on Steve's shoulders and moved him slightly, adjusting his position minutely before letting Steve swing once more.

Together, they practiced Steve's swing, Sean poking and prodding, his teaching harsh and sharp but welcome as Steve bent and molded himself to fit into the shape his father had demonstrated. Each touch to his arms, the nudging kick to his legs and feet, his father's deep voice washing over him and guiding him, left Steve's heart warm, his blood singing through his veins, his cheeks threatening to split with the force of his smile.

"Boys!" His mother's call slicing the stream of bonding, her voice echoing out into the forest and bouncing off the trees, doubling back on the trio, "Dinner's ready! Come inside!"

Steve bounded behind his father, the bat held aloft. When they'd returned to the warmth of the indoors, Steve and his father's cheeks

were bright pink, their skin tingling as heat was returned to their icy skin. The old bat was leaned gingerly against the wall, up out of the way of the shoe cupboard which Sean insisted his son shove his shoes into after hastily untying them. He shrugged out of his coat, passing it up to his father who draped it over the hook behind the door, Steve turned to the bat and flew upstairs, taking them two at a time, so that he could lay the new present on his bed, protected by the soft layers of sheets, covers and mattress foam.

Thumping down the stairs once more, after briefly swiping his hands under the tap, more of a symbolic effort to wash his hands than achieving any further cleanliness, Steve still couldn't fight the smile of his face. The smile didn't leave him throughout his dinner, a delicious roast beef, the gravy thick and heavy, the potatoes crunchy and hot. Afterwards, his mother let him have two bowls full of Christmas pudding, the gooey insides of the pudding making his own insides feel gooey and full. The smile remained firmly painted across his face as they settled in front of the T.V, watching a Christmas movie Steve's mother had rented that morning, Steve curled up to his mother's side, his head drooping every few minutes as he struggled through waves of sleep.

Before he was herded back to his room and into his bed, Sean had ruffled his hair, his voice warm and comforting as he spoke, "I hope you liked my present, Steve."

Steve nodded enthusiastically, wanting to wrap his arms around the other man but knowing he could not, "I love them, dad. Thank-you." Steve pressed forward slightly into the elder man's hand. Sean withdrew his hand, a tighter smile on his lips, but he didn't move any further away, only looked to his wife who wrapped her small hands around Steve's shoulders and guided him upstairs.

Sleep that night had come to him easily, the baseball bat hidden beneath his bed, his mother not allowing him to sleep with it by his side. The following morning, when he woke and sat at the table, chewing through a bowl of cereal, Steve couldn't remember a time when he had felt more disappointed that his father had gone away in the night.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi! Thanks for reading!

I have mostly written every other chapter, so updates should be fairly frequent! I just need to edit them a bit (a lot) and go through the 5 Stages of Self-Doubt before I post them aha. Some are much longer than this one! And contain a great deal more story so stick around, it gets dramatic af.

Also! I'm Australian so I've only ever played cricket and a tiny bit of softball, so if I got anything wrong with the baseball bat holding techniques, I'm sorry!! I was going off the very limited softball knowledge I have lol.

If you'd like, please leave a comment or something! I'd love to hear from you!

Thanks again for reading~!

2. Careers Day

Summary for the Chapter:

Steve doesn't know what his father does for a job, he's hoping he can learn alongside his classmates once Careers Day comes around.

1976, NOVEMBER 5TH - STEVE HARRINGTON - 10 YEARS OF AGE

"Is he outside?" Steve asked cautiously, poking his head out of the front door and leaning as far as he could to peer down the driveway, eyes scanning the empty pavement before ducking back inside, "When did he say he was coming?"

"He didn't, sweetie," His mother replied, pushing a brown paper bag into his hands and fixing the collar of his shirt with expert movements, her french tipped nails catching slightly on his neck, causing Steve to wince away, "He just said he'd be there in time, and I'm sure he will be."

"He promised he would come this time," Steve swallowed back tears, his voice wavering in surety as each minute passed by without his father arriving, "I told all my friends and the teacher he was gonna be there."

"And he'll be there," Steve's mother promised, patting down the boys wild hair, cropped short but still thick and unruly, "Trust me, trust him, has your father broken any promises before? Hm?"

Steve shook his head, swallowing down the burning tears that were aching in the backs of his eyes, "No."

"Exactly," his mother soothed, smiling kindly at him from her crouched position, "He'll be there. Now go wait out the front for Tommy's dad, okay? I'm sure your father will be waiting for you at the gates." Steve smiled shakily, nodding his head and pressing a kiss

to his mother's preferred cheek. He wiped at his eyes, pressing the palms of his hands against them before walking out the door and down the driveway, tripping slightly as he picked up his pace once he noticed Tommy's familiar car idling at the bottom.

"Hey, Steve!" Tommy's dad grinned back at him as he slid into the backseat, Tommy pushed him to move along as he shifted from his position in the passenger seat, beside his dad, to the seat next to Steve, "Excited for today?"

"Yeah," Steve beamed back, tapping his fingers against his knees anxiously, "Dad said he'd meet me at school, he's really busy." Tommy's father nodded, turning back to the front and flicking on his blinkers, swerving back onto the road itself, "Are you coming today too, Mr H?"

"Sure am," Tommy's dad grinned at Steve through the rear-view mirror, "I'll blow your mind with the ins and outs of a desk job in an insurance office."

Tommy groaned, slumping against the window and glaring out of it dejectedly, "He's gonna be so *boring*," Tommy huffed, crossing his arms firmly and scowling as the idea of his father regaling his small class with office gossip and the correct way to photocopy a 50 page legal document filled his mind.

"My dad's not gonna be boring," Steve supplied, hooking his fingers around Tommy's elbow and pulling until the other boy had uncrossed his arms, regarding him with a jealous stare, "He works in an office too, but he's the boss. And he goes on trips all the time! He's been to every other country in the *world*." Steve insisted, grinning and bouncing in his seat.

The extent of Steve's knowledge faltered to a stop once he was forced to consider what his father was the 'boss' of. His mother had never expanded upon where his father worked, or the countries he was visiting. When Steve had asked where his father had disappeared to her response would always prove to be, 'in the office, dear.' If he was gone for longer than a few days Steve's question would once again emerge and be hushed with the promise that he was 'abroad.' His father had never told Steve of all the countries he's visited and his

mother seemed to know less than Steve did, but with how often the older man was away Steve could only assume he'd seen the entire world, twice over, by now.

"You're so lucky," Tommy grumbled, glaring at the back of his father's head, he stretched across the backseat and pressed his foot into the worn material at the back of his fathers' seat until he saw Pete shift uncomfortably, eyes darting back to the boys behind him.

Steve shrugged, his neck warm threatening a light flush, "Yeah, I guess so."

Tommy's dad pulled into the parking outside the elementary school, springing out of the car and opening Steve's door with a flamboyant bow that caused Tommy to groan and Steve to stifle a laugh. Tommy slammed his door as he clambered out, stalking towards the school doors.

Steve and Mr Harris were still waiting on the curb, Steve's toes and calves aching as he stretched outwards, straining his eyes to try and spot his own father's familiar car. Tommy's dad squinted against the morning light, doing the same with a pinched frown.

"Hurry up!" Tommy shouted back at them, pausing at the school's entrance, unwilling to let his father wander through the halls unsupervised.

"Can you see him?" The older man asked Steve, halting his searching to look down at the young boy by his side. Steve's hands were wringing the straps of his backpack, his mouth turned inwards as his teeth clamped his lips together from the inside.

"No," he let out a breath, shaky and uncertain, before turning his nose up at Mr. H and shrugging, "He said he might be late, it's not a big deal. I'll wait for him."

Tommy's father scratched lightly at the corner of his mouth, an old anxious habit, "Why don't we wait for him inside?"

"No," Steve shook his head, avoiding the other man's gaze, "He said I should wait for him out here."

With a resigned sigh Tommy's father nodded, taking a step backwards not yet turning to face his own son, "Alright, if you're certain. Make sure you come in when the second bell rings."

"Yeah, he'll be there by then." Steve was certain, nodding firmly as he stretched once more onto the tips of his toes, his neck smarting with the effort he took to look through the crowded car-park.

Steve waited.

He waited as the car park was flooded by panicked parents, ushering their children from their cars with a rushed kiss to their cheek and a quick ruffle of their hair before peeling out of the car-park with a screech. He waited as careless high school students rolled in, shoving their younger siblings out of their cars with insults and rough words. He waited as teachers screeched out to the students still loitering on the front steps to get to their classroom. He waited as he heard lone footsteps, quietly approaching him from behind, soft footfalls in the dewy morning grass.

"Steve," Tommy's dad called, his voice gentle, "Come on inside."

"He's not here yet," Steve called back, refusing to turn from his position, desperately scanning the silent car-park, picking at the dry skin on his lips with his teeth.

"It's alright, come on, Mrs George wants you in class," Mr Harris' hand was large and warm, calloused where his own fathers wasn't, "Maybe he'll come a bit later. There's still time."

Steve swallowed thickly, nodding and forcing back the tears that had threatened him since he had awoke to find his house devoid of the other man. He spun on his heel, eyes trained determinedly on the bricks of the school wall, "I know that. He's still coming. He promised." Steve pursed his lips and marched towards the school

entrance, his vision swimming with the tears bubbling over his waterline, his eyes hot and aching.

It was almost recess and Steve's father was yet to be seen.

Tommy's father had sat between Tommy and Steve, the chair he sat in far too small for his tall frame, the bottom of his knees pressing against the edge of their table, but he didn't seem to mind.

He sat with them and clapped as each child pulled their father up to the front. He leaned down and gestured to both Tommy and Steve to lean into him as he whispered secrets he knew about each of the parents; how he knew that Stacey's father was best friends with Harry's mother in Elementary School, but Stacey's father had made Harry's mother eat a snail and they didn't talk to each other after that; How he and Georgie's father had been best friends until 9th grade and how Mrs George had taught them both when he was their age. He would clap again as the father finished their talk, he would explain the words that didn't make sense to Steve and Tommy - whoever appeared more confused at the time - with a kind smile. He would wave happily at the people he knew, even if they didn't wave back, even if their faces twisted into something Steve didn't think could be called a smile.

When it was Tommy's dad's turn to talk, Tommy dragged Steve up alongside him, "He's too embarrassing to do it by myself," Tommy had insisted, scowling out at their classmates and their parents. None of which seemed as interested in what Mr Harris had to say as Mr Harris had been in them.

"Ah, Tommy! And this, of course, must be Mr Harris," Mrs George smiled at Tommy and then his father, her eyes catching Steve's and her smile softened slightly, but didn't disappear, "Well, off you go."

"Good morning, everyone!" Tommy's dad began, beaming out at the group and raising his left hand to wave, "I'm Mr Harris, Pete for short, and I'm Tommy and Steve's dad." Pete clapped down his large hands on both of the boys' shoulders, the two children standing either side of the man, and pulled them into him. Steve's head shot up to look at the older man, eyebrows furrowed in confusion as Mr Harris merely winked in his direction, "I hope you're all excited to learn about insurance fraud."

Pete Harris' job was far more interesting than photocopying and filing, at least, that's how he made it out to be. Steve could hardly tear his eyes away from the older man, eagerly explaining the lengths someone will go to prove they'd been severely injured by an old woman's walking frame. Steve couldn't understand half the words that tumbled from Mr Harris' mouth but he found he didn't mind, finding entertainment in Tommy's flushed face, bright red as he stared at the ground, only catching his fathers' exuberant gestures through the shadows on the floor.

The rest of the classroom didn't seem to be following along very well either, drifting off to chatter with their friends or giggle behind their hands, but Steve didn't mind and neither did Mr Harris' apparently, as he barreled forward.

The parents appeared more interested, some smirking at the trio, some laughing at points that Mr Harris seemed pleased about, Mrs George was following along with a fond smile. Two mothers were leaning against the back wall, whispering, their eyes catching Steve's on several occasions and shooting him a pitying smile. Steve pressed himself closer to Mr Harris, staring back up at his wild gestures and expression filled face, careful to avoid collision as Pete's arms fell to his side in an exasperated gesture.

Tommy couldn't be more wrong, his father wasn't boring, he was brilliant.

"Thank-you, Pete." Mrs George finally interrupted as the bell broke through Tommy's father's speech, still unfinished but Steve supposed it always would have been, "That was very informative."

"Oh, anytime, Mrs George," Tommy's father grinned back, nodding his head, "A shame I didn't get to finish."

"Maybe next time," she chuckled, leaning down beneath the desk to reach for her bag, disappearing from sight.

"No, no next time, that was so *embarrassing*," Tommy whined, tugging Mr Harris back to his seat and picking up his fathers' jacket, shoving it into his hands, "Never again."

Pete laughed, ruffling Tommy's hair, much to Tommy's frustration, before turning to Steve, "Was I really that embarrassing, Steve?"

Steve grinned as Pete's eyes glanced down at Tommy, a smirk curling at his lips and subtly shaking his head, a hint that Steve didn't take lightly, "No! I thought you were really cool, Mr H."

"What?" Tommy spat, lips curled into a sneer as he looked between his best friend and his father, "He's not cool! He's so lame."

"Nah," Steve shook his head again, "He's so cool, you're so lucky Tommy!"

Tommy scoffed, shoving at his fathers back to push him out of the room, "Sure. Whatever you say, Steve. C'mon dad, get out of here before you brainwash Steve into thinking you're actually Captain America or something."

Steve and Tommy escorted Mr Harris to his car, Tommy positive that without a chaperone his father would embarrass himself and thus, embarrass Tommy and Steve and, in conclusion, could not be trusted to take the short trek alone.

The older man wrapped Tommy in a warm hug before he left, pressing a whiskery kiss to the protesting child's cheek and - with only a moments hesitation - he leaned down and wrapped Steve in the very same hug.

"Thanks, Mr H." Steve whispered, squeezing the man tightly, feeling the tears that had haunted his morning reappear once more.

"Maybe he just got the times mixed up," Pete suggested, rubbing a

firm hand across Steve's small back before pulling away, his smile no less warm and containing not an ounce of pity.

Steve swallowed thickly, "Yeah, maybe."

Mr Harris only smiled in response, "I'll see you boys tonight," he addressed to both Steve and Tommy, "Be good now!"

"Ugh, yes dad, hurry up and leave," Tommy grumbled, stepping away from the car and back towards the gates they had slipped through. They'd have to run back to the school grounds and hope they wouldn't catch the teachers' eye to avoid trouble.

"Bye Mr H!" Steve waved, grinning as Tommy snatched down Steve's hand and dragged him back through the school's front grassy area, ignoring Pete's loud laughter and Tommy's grumbling as they sprinted back towards the entrance.

Sean Harrington slipped into his position at the head of the table as Steve was scrapping the last of his gravy up with his knife, licking the dull edge as he watched his father loosen his tie and sneer at the food his mother had placed in front of him.

"Stop that," Sean scolded, catching Steve's sharp gaze and poor table manners. Steve let the knife drop and shifted his gaze, the knife clattered against the china plate and Steve's mother sighed.

"Steve, that better not be broken."

"It's not," Steve promised, moving the knife to rest more tastefully across the plate, aligning with his fork, the white china devoid of any cracks or food, "Can I go now?"

"No, wait for your father to finish," his mother refused, cutting into her own meal which Steve was certain must be stone cold with how long she had waited.

The meal had been tense, Steve sat with his arms crossed firmly over his chest, glaring down at the wooden table, the grains beginning to swirl under his intense gaze. If he stared long enough, hard enough, maybe they would open up and let Steve clamber through it, away from his fathers' tense shoulders and his mothers' pursed lips, barely opening wide enough to let her meal through.

"So," his mother attempted to break the silence, "How was careers day?"

"Good," Steve's father responded before Steve had had a chance to open his mouth. Steve shot his father a confused glance but the older man refused to look at his son, the sharp kick to his shins was enough to indicate what he expected Steve to do.

"Oh, really?" His mother asked, a terse smile was sent Steve's way and Steve responded in kind, hoping that if he scrunched his eyes shut hard enough she'd believe it.

"Yup!" Steve enthused, uncrossing his arms and gripping the seat of his chair, crossing his index and middle fingers beneath the wood, "He was really cool, mum! Everyone loved him." Steve turned to his father, grinning once more, and his father nodded to him, a small smile gracing his own lips.

Steve's mother smiled softly, however an edge still lingered on her words when she spoke, "Is that so? I didn't know kids would be so interested in banking."

Another sharp kick to his shins, his father's shoes were made entirely of leather, the tops were soft and pliable but the soles were hard and

sharp.

"Oh, yeah," Steve nodded enthusiastically, "Dad made it really fun!" His mother still appeared unconvinced, her lips pursing as she set down her utensils, Steve pushed onward, "He wasn't like Tommy's dad, he was so boring, I almost fell asleep." Steve swallowed the burning that appeared in his throat, clogging it momentarily and causing his next words to be slightly hoarse, "I felt so bad for Tommy, he was so embarrassed."

"Hm," his mother hummed, dark eyes glancing down the table at her husband, "that's wonderful, Steve. I'm glad you had fun."

"Yeah, I really did," Steve forced a yawn, stretching his mouth wide and slapping a hand across his open mouth last second in feigned surprise, "Oh! Sorry."

"It's alright, Steve," his father interjected, "It was an exciting day, you must be tired. Why don't you head up to bed?"

"Okay," Steve shot out of his chair, moving around the table to press a kiss to his mother's cheek, "Goodnight, Mum." He waved as he passed his father, "Goodnight, Dad."

He could hear his mother's light footsteps as she came up the stairs, hours later, and pressed his eyes shut, slowing down his breathing and curling up beneath his blanket, willing her away. He could feel her weight shifting the bed beneath him, dipping at the edge as her hand reached out to brush the hair from his face, her soft fingertips tracing his nose and cheekbones.

"You wouldn't lie to me, would you, Steve?" She murmured, her index finger twirling around his hair gently, ticklish against his skin.

Steve didn't answer, his breathing steady, his eyes pressed shut so tightly Steve could see colours dancing on the backs of his eyelids.

His mother's hand moved to smooth out the creases the effort to keep his eyes shut so firmly caused on his forehead.

If Steve knew the answer, he would open his eyes and let it rush out to his mother in a heartbeat. But Steve wasn't sure if it counted as lying.

Sometimes, when Steve asked if he could hang out at Tommy's house and his father agreed, he would return to find his mother asking him how the baseball game was. Sometimes, when Steve got home from watching a movie in the theatres with Carol, Tommy and Tommy's dad, his father would pick him up outside and ask him to explain the movie in details that his father would later relay to his wife, as though he had been there himself.

Whenever his mother asked odd questions, Steve would cross his fingers behind his back and nod along. Whenever his father kicked his shins or pressed his sharp fingers into his shoulder, Steve would cross his fingers and nod along.

He's not sure if that counted as lying.

He's not sure that it counted as telling the truth either.

When his mother asked again, "You'd tell me, wouldn't you? You'd tell me if he was lying." Steve didn't answer, burrowed down in his pillow and resisted the burning itch in his arms that demanded he pull the covers over his head.

His mother sobbed like he'd told her 'no.'

And in a way, he guesses, he had.

Notes for the Chapter:

I'm back!! I think I like this chapter? I'm not sure. I hope you did at least.

If y'all can spot the comparisons between Tommy's dad and Steve's dad, well done! Although I don't think I'm being very subtle lol. Also I noticed when I was editing that my tenses switched between present and past a little bit, I'm pretty sure I fixed it but if you notice anything pls do let me know and I'll change it!

Thanks for reading~! Hope you enjoyed it aha. Thanks to everyone who bookmarked and left kudos too! I really appreciate it~

3. White Tablecloths and Red Nails

Notes for the Chapter:

warning: derogatory use of the word retard.

1977, NOVEMBER 6TH - STEVE HARRINGTON - 11 YEARS OF AGE

A glittering black Cadillac awaited his father at the end of their driveway, the driver hidden behind thick, tinted glass. There was a woman, her sunglasses just as heavily tinted, pressed high on her nose as she waits, her body lean and long, lazing against the shiny black surface. Her fingers are manicured neatly, painted a bright red and pointed at the tip. Steve is glad she didn't ask to shake his hand as he rattled past on his bike, clattering down the driveway with messy hair and flushed cheeks. The woman's blonde hair caught his eye, long and fluttering in the gentle breeze, framing her face and caressing her cheeks.

His father stood on the doorstep, just outside the house, his bag dangled from his hand as he leaned in to press a terse kiss to his wife's cheek. His mother had turned to offer him her right cheek, as always, and his father had pressed his thin, dry lips against it as though she were diseased and contagious.

Steve left his bike leaning against the front wall of the house and moved to take his father's bag, the older man relinquishing his grip easily, offering no sign of gratitude as the small boy lugged the heavy bag back down the driveway. The driver made no move to help him, Steve long ago learned how to pop the boot himself, learned the importance of placing his father's bag carefully in the back right corner of the boot and closing the lid firmly. His father never told him the contents of the bag, but he knew it must be important, he'd been scolded before for throwing it in too haphazardly.

Steve's father may look like he could care less about the whereabouts and doings of his son but he could sniff out impolite, improper and unacceptable behaviour the moment it happened. His sharp hands catching him in the act and fixing him immediately. His father was good at fixing problems.

"Be good for your mother," his father warned as he passed, opening the gleaming black door, the glossy texture catching the sunlight beaming down around them and causing Steve to wince as the light hit his eyes. He nodded, a quiet, "Yes Sir," passing through his lips. His father let the woman in before him, her lips curling into a strange smile as she slid inside the slick car.

Steve knew his father had always had impeccable manners, the importance of them had been drilled into Steve since he was old enough to walk. Respect your elders, ladies first, never eat before everyone is seated, always ask about his mother's day, keep yourself clean and presentable, never cry in the public eye, keep the family secrets.

To do otherwise would be offensive and inappropriate, something a Harrington must never be, must never do. Every movement must be planned, proper and polite.

Steve waved off his father, a childish smile pressed on his lips as he waved until the car disappeared from sight. The windows were too dark to see if his father was waving back, Steve liked to think he was.

"Steve! Put away your bike please!" His mother called, her tone light yet commanding, as if daring you to undermine her. Steve jogged back to his bike, rolling it into the garage and stowing it away, the metal no longer gleamed in the sun like his father's car had been now that the bike was hidden among the shadows.

That night at dinner, his mother sat down at the dinner table, smoothed out the creases in the white tablecloth, and smiled primly at him over their dry chicken breast and boiled vegetables.

"How was your day today, mum?" Steve asked, his words too stiff to be his own, eyes fixed too intently on hers to be of his own will. His

mother's smile broadened slightly, she picked up her knife and fork and cut delicately into the chicken as she spoke in her newfound calm and slow manner, as though she was making a speech.

"I picked up some groceries, the new girl working there has beautiful blonde hair, I must ask her which salon she goes to next time I visit. Otherwise, I spent my day cleaning up around here," She placed the small portion of chicken on her tongue, setting down her utensils as she chewed, the conversation paused while Steve waited for to ask him in return, the house silent around them, "How was your day today, Steve?"

Steve smiled, carved into his own meal, and chose the beans to eat first, "It was fun! Tommy and I rode our bikes around town after school and chased Carol around, Tommy hates her. And we looked in the record store because Tommy reckons he almost has enough to buy one but he doesn't know what he'd get." He shoved the beans in his mouth, slightly more violent than strictly necessary, "And I got a B- in my maths exam."

His mother's lips twitched into a bigger smile, her teeth pearly white, recently bleached, "That's excellent, Steve. Your father will be so pleased."

The boy beamed in response, carving into the chicken and fighting back the urge to wrinkle his nose at it's bland taste and dry texture. His smile quickly fell from his lips as he struggled through his meal, the silence between him and his mother oppressive. They had exhausted the planned list of conversation topics, the polite and proper dinner conversation, all before Steve had choked his way through his meal.

The moment Steve had cleared his plate, Steve's mother lifted it out from under him, carrying her own, half-full, plate of food into the kitchen, scrapping her leftovers into the bin, the scratching of the knife against the china grating against Steve's ears and caused the boy to dig his nails into the wooden chair beneath him.

At a glance, the house appeared spotless, clinically clean, each surface glimmering brightly under the lights, the table cloth crisp and a sharp white, not a stain to be seen. Steve wished he could have

eaten something that would risk it getting stained. If he had dropped his chicken on the table cloth it would likely only pull whatever moisture was left from the meat and leave him with the chalky remains.

The Christmas tree that had once stood proudly in their living this time of year, was absent, their lounge devoid of any decoration as his father had protested such early celebration and his mother's passion for the holiday and dimmed over time.

He could hear his mother in the kitchen, the pipes humming as she filled the sink and rinsed the two dishes. It didn't take her long, she never let dishes pile up and two people could only create so much mess.

"Will Dad be back for Christmas?" Steve asked as his mother returned and placed a small bowl of ice-cream in front of him, she settled back into her own chair and clasped her hands together in her lap, pursing her lips firmly.

"No," she shook her head, "he didn't mention when he'd be returning, but it won't be before New Years at least."

Steve nodded, scooping up the majority of the ice-cream and depositing the creamy dessert into his mouth without hesitation, his teeth sinking into the ice-cold surface and his cheeks rounding out with the mass of food in his mouth.

Through his stuffed mouth, Steve garbled out, "Was she Dad's new secretary?"

"Who?" Steve's mother asked primly, brushing down her well-pressed skirt, frowning at his lack of manners.

"That lady waiting by the car, didn't you see her?" Steve swallowed a portion of the ice-cream before going back for more, "Is she Dad's new secretary?"

"Don't talk with your mouth full," his mother snapped, her manicured nails digging into her skirt, ruining the carefully ironed pleats, "and I suppose she must be."

Steve licked the rest of the ice-cream from the back of his spoon, "Stop that," his mother chided sharply, and Steve shoved the spoon into his mouth in response, letting it hang between his lips as he mentioned, "She's really pretty."

His mother grunted, snatching the bowl out from under him and the silver spoon from his mouth, "Is she?"

"Yeah," Steve continued, watching his mother disappear from the room and into the kitchen, the sound of the faucet opening and a silver spoon clattering with china the only sounds in the big, empty house, "She's really skinny, too."

His mother only hummed from the kitchen, barely audible above the sounds of rushing water and the squeak of rubber gloves. Steve didn't leave his seat, instead he pulled his legs up until his chin rested on his knees and wrapped his arms around them tightly, "And she has pointy fingernails, bright red, they're really cool."

"Shut up, Steve." His mother demanded, the sound of her hand as it slammed down on the taps echoed around the house, as did the screech of the pipes as she hurriedly closed the faucet once more.

"And her hair's really long, and blonde, and pretty. And she had these really cool sunglasses, it made her look like a spy or something," Steve rambled on, he couldn't stop the flow of words, only feeling encouraged at his mothers' break in composure.

"I said, shut up, Steve."

"Her pants were too tight for her, I think, but they looked nice," he plowed forwards, trying to drag back the picture of the woman in his mind, to remember all the details of her slim, intimidating frame, "And she was really young too, I wonder how she got a job with dad, cause she looked younger than Carol's older sister and she only graduated High School a few years ago so-

"SHUT UP, SHUT UP, *SHUT UP!*" His mother screeched, punctuated by the smashing of a china, shattering against the tiled kitchen floor, "Why won't you *listen* to me and just *shut up*, you retard."

Steve clamped his hand around his mouth, his jaw aching as he ground his teeth together to keep his mouth from opening once more, to hold back the steady flow of questions he knew would enrage his mother further.

"Go to your room," she spat from the kitchen, her voice distant, "If I see your face again tonight, you'll be sleeping outside."

He slipped quietly from his chair, softly creeping towards the staircase before pausing on the third step, "Why doesn't he take us, too?"

"Go to bed, Steve." Each word was strong, angry, hissed through gritted teeth. He could imagine her face, bright red and splotchy, tears collecting at the corners of her eyes, hands shaking and bleeding as small cuts emerged on her hands while she picked up the broken shards of her white china bowl.

Steve waited on the steps; he waited for far longer than he should have. He waited until he could hear her smothered sobbing, ugly and choking, he waited until he could hear a glass being pulled from the cabinets and a cork being popped, he waited until he could hear her moving back into the dinning room where she would be able to see him before he turned and sprinted up the stairs. His feet pounded loudly against the wood and he didn't stop until he had slammed his bedroom door behind him.

He sat and waited for her footsteps to follow, heavy and threatening, but they never came. The only sound in his dark room was his own harsh breathing as he sat, cross-legged on his bed, his baseball bat clutched firmly in hand. He'd never had to defend himself from his mother, her rage overflowed instead through insults and unfulfilled threats, but he had wondered if tonight would be the night she finally snapped at him, finally chased him up the stairs and burst into his room, palm raised and morals abandoned.

She didn't.

He wished she would.

Steve fell asleep curled around his baseball bat and awoke to an

empty house, Tommy's father honking outside, someone pounding on his front door and his alarm clock flashing 8:02.

Notes for the Chapter:

I hope this one made sense to y'all. I always read fics where Steve was super lovely to his mum which is awesome! But I feel like his comment about how his mum travels with his father cause she doesn't trust him is Steve being a little bitter towards his mother, which I think might've started a lot earlier and he might have felt a lot stronger when he was younger. I don't think he completely understands what his father is doing at this point, but I do think Steve wants his mother to break the pattern, for something new to happen, which is why he snaps. But that's just my opinion aha, if you disagree or you hate it or something, that's okay!

Anyway! Thanks for reading and thanks for leaving Kudos and comments and the like. I'd love to hear from you!! And if you wanna chat more my tumblr is : backyardbarf.

4. Anna Richards

Notes for the Chapter:

chapter warnings: implied abuse, gas-lighting (i think is what that's called????), lowkey domestic abuse and just other sad things wow

1978, NOVEMBER 7TH - STEVE HARRINGTON - 12 YEARS OF AGE

"Anna Richards is staring at you again," Carol's sneered into his ear during Maths, her desk creaking as she leaned her entire body-weight against it.

Steve's eyes drifted over to the brunette girl, her eyes a bright blue and, true to Carol's word, they were boring into the side of his head. Once they had made eye contact Anna's gaze had snapped back to her desk, the force exerted on her pencil so strong that the led snapped against the paper. Carol snorted behind him.

"She *loves* you," Carol sung, slipping back into her seat at Mr Terrence's sharp glare as he turned back from writing on the chalkboard.

"Do you have something you want to share with the class, Ms Young?" Carol's eye flickered across the room to the now red-faced Anna, her hair acting as a curtain while also revealing the red tips of her ears and the rash like colour disappearing down her neck. Steve had turned to face Carol, caught the smirk on her lips before she leaned back in her chair and opened her mouth;

"Yeah, Anna Richards is in love with Steve. She wants to make out with him in the bike shed."

Mr Terrence sighed as the class erupted into a chorus of 'oo's and cackling laughter, hands thundering against wooden desks and feet

slamming against the carpeted floors, from the corner of his eye he saw Anna drop her head into her arms as the boy behind her shoved roughly between her shoulder blades, a cruel grin on his face. Anna Richards wasn't popular enough to even have a chance with Steve and Carol knew it. Carol loved it, if the grin hidden behind her slightly chubby hand was anything to go by.

"Alright, alright! Settle down," Mr Terrence demanded from the front of the room, slamming a ruler down against the wooden desktop, "Carol, you'll find a seat waiting for you in the principals office, off you go."

Carol stood as gracefully as a twelve-year-old could, sweeping her pencils into her book bag and gliding past Anna, her chin tilted towards the sky. She winked at Steve as she left and Steve couldn't help the smile that curled his lips in response. Carol was mean, but she'd always been nice to him, and she was funny.

Anna had spent the rest of the class with her head down, and when she left, her eyes were red and puffy, her nose running and her fringe frizzy. She didn't look at Steve as she ran through the door, backpack clutched tightly to her chest and she'd abandoned her pencil case, still open and spilling out coloured pencils, glittery on the sides.

Without a moments pause Steve had swooped past Anna's desk, collecting the fallen pencils and their abandoned case and sprinting after the red-faced girl, "Anna! Wait!"

She wasn't an ugly girl, not quite. She wore thick glasses that hid her eyes, and they really were a bright, piercing blue, but the glasses were so round and thick against her face that she appeared more like an owl than a girl at times. Her hair, while thick and curly, tended to frizz outwards, the fringe in particular created an awning like affect across her whole face. Her skin wasn't entirely clear, the first few hits of puberty leaving behind bright red spots on her chin and a mole rested just above her eyebrow. She certainly wasn't pretty, but she was good enough.

Good enough, Steve thought, for this to work, at least.

"Go away!" Anna shrieked, spinning on her heel to face Steve in the

hallway, "You just want to tease me."

"No," Steve insisted gently, stepping forwards, ignoring how Anna pedaled backwards, warily eyeing the crowd that had begun to form as other students were let out of their classrooms, all eager for a show to keep them entertained between their final classes, "You left your pencil case."

Anna eyed the pencil case in Steve's hand, stuck out towards her, as though it could mutate into a creature filled with teeth and razors, "Oh." She muttered, swallowing thickly and rubbing harshly at her face as fresh tears had sprung to her eyes.

Steve moved closer, until he could press the pencil case into her hands with a small smile, holding the girl's hands in his own, "Ya know, I wouldn't mind kissing you either."

"What?" Anna pouted, her chin wobbling dangerously, tears that had welled up were spilling over, racing down her cheeks and catching on her jaw, "Stop teasing me."

"I'm not, I swear," Steve smirked, moving closer still, his hands still wrapped around Anna's, "Can I?"

"Can you what?"

"Kiss you."

Anna bit her lip, swallowing through her burning throat, before she nodded, tilting forward on her toes and looking into Steve's eyes as he pressed against her, bending down slightly to reach her, murmuring, "Close your eyes." Anna's eyes slid shut as the crowd around them were hooted and hollered, teachers were pushing through the crowd to try and reach the pair in the middle, shouts of detentions and calls home were ignored as Steve pressed impossibly closer.

He leaned in, his lips grazing hers, before he switched paths, sliding down the side of her face, his breath hot against her ear, when he snarled, "As if, four-eyes."

Steve reeled back, shoving her shoulder lightly, grinning as she

stumbled and basked in the jeering laughter around him. Mr Terrence, who had been the closest to the pair, had finally broken through, marching towards Steve with his neck bright red and the sweat patches on his cheap blue button up evident beneath his armpits.

The sharp slap across his cheek had been a surprise.

"You are awful, Steve Harrington." Anna spat, her fist clenched at her side as she panted, tears forever falling down her face and hitting the floor, "You're horrible and mean and I hope no one ever loves you."

Steve held a hand against his cheek, sneering at the girl across from him as she scowled back, eyes glowering fiercely beneath those thick, coke-bottle glasses, "Good luck ever finding someone who'll love you back, four-eyes."

Mr Terrence had landed his heavy hands down on Steve's shoulders, steering him through the crowd of hurriedly dispersing students as teachers multiplied as the fight had seemed to reach it's climax. Mr Terrence didn't speak to him until Steve was sat down in the hallway, two seats away from Carol who watched with an unabashedly curious gaze as Steve was forced into the chair, still holding his stinging cheek.

"You remind me of your father sometimes, Harrington." He warned, pursing his lips and glaring down at the boy, who had puffed his chest in response, "I wouldn't be taking that as a compliment."

The heels of the other man's dress shoes clicked as he walked back down the hall, echoing off the locker lined walls before he ducked into a classroom and disappeared from Steve's line of sight. Carol shot a quick glance at the receptionist caged behind walls of glass and trapped beneath piles of paperwork, before she jumped into the seat beside him, tapping Steve on the shoulder and barely suppressing the excited grin that threatened to break across her face.

"So, watcha do?"

Steve couldn't fight off his coy grin, leaning into Carol and lowering his voice, "I tricked Anna into thinking I was gonna kiss her." Carol

cackled loudly, head thrown back and her red hair falling against the chair, curling around the wooden back. The receptionist glanced up from her computer with a tight frown, her hand raising and pointing to the side, indicating for Carol and he to separate.

Carol blinked at her, smothering her laughter enough to leave a smug smirk hidden behind her hand, while she tilted her head in false confusion, her eyebrows scrunching together and eyes questioning, masking the mirth swimming within them, before turning back to Steve, her lips splitting into a grin once more. Steve let his hand drop from his cheek and Carol's grin twisted, the amusement falling from her face as she took in the bright red hand print, "She do that?"

"Yeah," Steve shrugged, "It doesn't hurt too bad."

"She shouldn't hit you," Carol giggled, "I'll sort her out, or I'll get Tommy to sort her out, she should know better than to hit you."

"It's not so bad," Steve interjected, worrying his bottom lip between his teeth, "Really, it's okay."

Carol's lips twisted into a sneer, "She still shouldn't have done it. I'll get her back. I was gonna get her back for getting me in trouble anyway."

Steve shifted uneasily in his seat, pressing the back of his hand against his burning cheek and relishing in the cool touch, "What'll you do to her?"

"Nothing too obvious," Carol shook her head, lips twisting and eyes searching the ceiling as she thought, "Mean notes in her locker, and I'll get Tommy to tell all the boys that she was the one that tried to kiss you, and slapped you when you said no." Carol's eyes landed back on Steve's face, lingering on his left side. She cast another quick glance at the receptionist who had yet to take her eyes off the pair before she leaned in and pushed Steve's hand away, brushing her own hand along the inflamed flesh. Carol's touch was shy, gentle and soothing in a way his own hand could not be.

"I won't let anyone hurt you like that again," Carol promised, locking eyes with Steve as she ran her cool finger tips over his cheek, "cause

you help me too."

He nodded hurriedly, reaching up to hold Carol's hand in his own, squeezing around her knuckles and offering her a soft smile, and promised, "I'll look after you, too."

"Ms Young," the receptionist interrupted, poking her head out around the glass dividers, "your father's waiting for you outside," her lips were a thin, fine line on her face matching the lines that marked her forehead and around her eyes relentlessly, her gaze sharp on the pair that were far too close together. Carol swallowed thickly, kicking her feet before looking once more at Steve, the previous violent confidence drained from her slightly round face.

"Can you call tonight? At 7?" Carol asked cautiously, avoiding Steve's gaze and letting her hand fall from from his cheek yet still caught in Steve's firm grip.

"Um, yes, I think so, yeah," Steve squeezed her hand tightly one final time before letting it go, Carol pushed up onto the floor, looking down at Steve still slightly hunched in his chair.

"Good. Don't forget." With her final demand, Carol slunk out of the office, towards where her father was waiting. Steve knew that he wouldn't see her tomorrow, or the next day and when she would return on Friday, she'd be meaner than ever and Tommy would hold her hand like he was afraid she'd disappear and Steve would pretend not to notice the way she shook like a leaf in the wind whenever she thought no one was looking.

"Mr Harrington," the receptionist called out moments later, as the Principal's door swung open and the man himself stood there with tired eyes and limp, grey and greasy hair to match his barely trimmed mustache, "the principal is ready to see you."

Steve stepped into the Principal's office, forcing his chest to puff outwards as he walked past the man himself, ignoring his exasperated gaze as he settled into the plush seat facing the desk and the window that looked out over the school grounds.

The Principal shuffled slowly around him, arranging himself in his

own seat with a groan, eyes trained on the bookshelves lining his walls for several moments much to Steve's increasing frustration.

With a heavy sigh, the Principal finally spoke, eyes dropping to meet Steve's, "We called home and your mother has no way of coming to collect you, however she wishes for me to convey her severe disappointment and disapproval of your actions. She wants you to know that she is ashamed for you and of you, and that you should expect 'hell' when you return home. She wants you home immediately."

Steve shuffled in his seat, the false confidence that filled his chest began to deflate rapidly, the older man across from him rubbed a heavy hand across his face and released another tired sigh, "We're short of teaching staff and can't afford to be sacrificing a single teacher to escort you home and, to be quite honest with you Mr Harrington, you're not worth the trouble."

"I can ride home," Steve suggested hurriedly, his hands clenching around the edge of the seat of his chair, "my bike's outside."

"No, you cannot," the older man asserted, "we tried to contact your father, he's unavailable for the foreseeable future, according to his receptionist. We contacted Tommy Harris' father, and he is unable to get to you, I'm sure you're aware of why?"

"His car broke down, it's why we rode to school," Steve answered, licking his drying lips, "Why are you telling me this?"

"Because I want you to know just how much your little stunt has inconvenienced the entire town," the principal drawled, leaning back in his chair, the old wooden frame creaking beneath his weight, "I've had to call in the Chief of Police to escort you home, Mr Harrington. This is the fifth time this month you've caused disruption in my school. So now, you've wasted not only your parents time, and my time, my staff's time, the students' time, Mr Harris' time and your own time, but now you've sunk to new lows and you're wasting the County Police's time. Which could be spent far better than making sure you don't run off because you just couldn't help yourself."

Steve bristled in his seat, lowering his head and begging the tears

welling up behind his eyes to dissolve, to drain back down his now burning throat and allow him to glare up at Principal Connors, allow him to spit back in his face and storm from the room, grab his bike and run and not care for the consequences.

Instead, the hot tears that burned in the backs of his eyes, rushed forward, and he bit into his lip harshly, he could taste the copper-like blood pooling on his tongue and he swallowed it back despite the rolling of his stomach, thick with guilt, as the tears dripped down his cheeks.

"If you insist on playing your petty, little games," Principal Connors leaned forward once more, hands on his desk as she pressed as close as he could to the child on the opposite side, "then do it outside of my school, where it doesn't affect me. I'm not fixing your mistakes any longer. One more school incident, and you're out. I don't care who your father is. Do I make myself clear?"

Steve inhaled a sharp, gasping breath, avoiding the older man's eyes and instead pinning his gaze on the blurry patterned carpet beneath him.

"Do I make myself clear, Mr Harrington?" the principal snapped, slamming an open palm against the polished wood of his desk, jostling the papers, computer and picture frames that decorated it.

Steve nodded, swallowing around the lump that had built in his throat and gasped out a quiet, "Yes, sir."

"Good," the older man leaned back once more, patting down the greasy strands of hair that still clung to his scalp, "Get out of my school."

It took everything he had not to sprint from the dim office, walking briskly back to his locker and fumbling with the combination, tears obscuring his vision and falling to the tiled floor as his shaky hands pulled frantically at the closed metal door again and again. After a few more moments, Steve pulled at the door one final time before rearing back and punching it, his fist stinging. The sound of ringing metal filling the silent hallway startling him more than the pain searing through his knuckles. Steve didn't wait to see if it had been

noticed, turning on his heel and sprinting back down the hall, bursting out into the open air and not stopping until he hit the curb.

"Get my number *off* their call list," Sean Harrington hissed at his wife, as Steve watched quietly from the top of the stairs, chin tucked between his knees as he sat hidden in the dark, "It's a waste of everyone's time."

Steve's mother clicked her tongue against the roof of her mouth, the sound echoing loudly against the freshly painted, bright, white walls, "Oh, I apologise for assuming you'd be interested in the well-being of your only son."

"He's an arrogant little shit, the only updates I get are calls from that worthless old man to tell me he's acting like an asshole again, hardly life-threatening," his father says, his shoes loud against the polished floorboards, overpowering the sound of his mother's bare feet padding across the tile in the kitchen.

"It might be, one day, he might get into serious trouble Sean, and then what?"

"Then *you* handle it!" Sean roared, slamming open the front door and letting the metal door handle fly against the plaster wall, denting the painted surface and rattling the picture frames that hung delicately on the wall, "Surely you're not so useless as to fail at keeping my son alive! That's the only thing you *have* to do!"

"Where are you going?" His mother cried hysterically, flinging herself out of the kitchen and into the entrance hall, where Steve could see both of them clearly, no longer hidden among the shadows of a dimly lit dinning room or behind the walls of the kitchen. Steve glanced down at his wrist, angling his arm so that the light fell onto his watch

face, revealing the time to be five minutes to seven.

"Out."

"With who?" Steve's mother demanded, squeezing herself between Sean and the door, pressing against the taller man's chest as though forcing him back into the house.

"None of your business," Sean sneered, shoving the woman back against the door frame, and stuffing his arms into his winter coat, fumbling around the umbrella stand as he took in the heavy downpour outside, turning the prematurely ice-y ground to slush.

His mother sobbed, pressing against Sean once more, throwing herself against his hard chest until he stumbled backwards, back into the dinning room and into the shadows, "Yes, *it is*. You're my husband, I want to know who you're going out with."

Sean grunted, pushing the woman off once more, watching her fall to the floorboards with a sickening slap, "You can't always get what you want."

"It's her, isn't it?" His mother demanded, pushing herself up from the floor and scrambling to her feet, desperate to get the upper hand, "The girl Steve saw, your receptionist," she drew a shuddering, gasping breath, "The girl you're cheating on me with! I know you are, I'm not stupid, Sean, I know you're cheating on me!" Her voice was high and wavering, at a fever pitch, Steve could hear every shaky and shudder in her voice as it pushed through her panic, "Admit it! Just admit it!"

"Are you hearing yourself?" Sean sneered, whirling around on his wife, "Do you hear yourself when you say shit like this? That's bullshit and you know it, Jean. You're so paranoid, it's fucking insane."

"I'm not, I'm not!" Jean screeched, pounding a fist against Sean's chest, heaving sobs chasing every word that tumbled from her mouth, "I know you're cheating on me, I know it, I know you."

"You don't know anything," Sean spat, grabbing his wife by the wrists

and pushing her down to the floor for a final time, moving back towards the open door preparing to brave the howling winds and flooding rain, "You're driving me insane, Jean. You're driving yourself insane in this fucking house."

"And whose fault is that!" Jean's broken howling sob followed him, as she remained curled up on the floorboards, her head inches away from the egg white walls, clutching at her stomach as she shook.

Sean answered in the form of a slamming door, muting the sound of the storm raging outside, which disguised the sound of his car sputtering to a start, the ground too wet to screech with the speed Sean pulled out of the driveway, tearing down the empty street and into the rain. Steve glanced down at his wrist once more, the minute hand resting two minutes past the hour, and bit down a sigh as he rose to his feet.

He clumped down the stairs, not bothering to hide his heavy footfalls as he approached his mother, still heaving heavy sobs into the polished floorboards, snot collecting beneath her nose as she wailed. Steve stepped over her shaking form, his heel nudging her knees as he navigated around her, the phone tucked against the wall just beyond her.

"Steve?" His mother called through her sobs, her voice weak and shuddering. Steve dialed Carol's home number, his fingers steady and sure as it punched in each digit, the receiver already pressed against his ear, the ringing loud in his ear.

"Young residence, this is Carol speaking," Carol's voice hit his ears, strong and willful beyond the slight shake he'd caught in the beginning, "Who is this?"

"Sorry I'm late," Steve answered instead, letting his finger run through the curling cord attaching the phone to the hanger, "is this okay?"

"Ah, yes sir? No sorry, sir. We're not interested," Carol says, her voice loud and clear and for more ears than just Steve.

"Who is it?" A deeper voice roars, faint to Steve's ears but still loud enough to be heard at all.

"Telemarketers," Carol calls back, politely, sweetly.

"Tell 'em to fuck off," the voice shouted back, vicious and filled with a wild anger.

"Yes, sir." Carol called back, before her voice became clearer again as she pressed her mouth back to the phone, "Sorry sir, but we're really not interested."

"You okay?" Steve asked, leaning his shoulder against the white walls, staring above his mother's crumbled form, he could feel her bloodshot eyes staring up at him, "Did it work?"

"Yes, sir. I will," Carol replied, her yes louder than the rest of the words, as though she'd been caught by surprise, as though she had spotted Steve across the street and wanted to get his attention.

"Good. I'll talk to you soon," he could hear Carol's sharp breaths over the phone, hear how tightly she gripped the plastic by the squeaking of her sweaty palm against the handphone, taking in his promises, "Same time tomorrow night?"

"Yes, sir, *thank-you*," Carol breathed down the phone, relief tingeing her final words before the obnoxious bleating of the dial tone filled Steve's ear. He let it ring for a few seconds more before clicking the phone back into place, letting his eyes dart to his mother who still lay practically at his feet, eyes heavy-lidded and leaking tears, her nose running disgustingly.

Steve stepped over her once more, ignoring how she flinched when he raised his foot, and stumbled back up the stairs to his room. Staring out his black window at the glowing blue light of the pool, steam drifting upwards, caught in the reverent light. His homework lay abandoned on his desk, the T.V he had been flicking through half an hour prior had been switched off once the fighting had gotten too loud to ignore, the screen still buzzing slightly if Steve moved close enough, static electricity chasing his fingers if he ran his hand along the glass.

When the pool lights had automatically dimmed and faded, when the T.V had cooled down entirely and the moon had risen to its peak, the

watch on his wrist indicating the hour of seven minutes past one, Steve slunk down the hall once more.

He paused, for a moment, at his parents open bedroom, ducking instead and tearing the throw blanket from it's perfectly arranged position, before thudding down the stairs, blanket wrapped around his forearm. His mother remained on the floorboards, wound tightly around herself, still shaking, but asleep, her breathing soft and slow.

Steve draped the blanket over her shuddering frame, moving into the lounge room and tugging out his mother's least favourite throw pillow from the couch and taking it back to his mother, gently lifting her head and sliding it beneath her, careful not to get his hands caught in her untamed hair.

When Steve woke the following morning, his parent's bedroom door was closed and his mother had disappeared from the entrance hall.

He walked to school and arrived an hour and a half late, feet aching, soaked to the bone and avoiding the stern eyes of Principal Connors.

Notes for the Chapter:

(kids are so meeean, i remember back when i was 12, terrible years lmao)

hi!! i'm sorry this took so long. i hope it's okay? i'm not very confident about this one hence why it took so long. thanks so much to everyone who commented or read this story! i hope you still like it lol. hopefully the next update will be fairly soon! have a happy easter if you celebrate it~! (sorry it's so angsty lol)

5. Forest of Love

Notes for the Chapter:

Warnings: underaged drinking, sex (not like...described intensely but it is certainly there) both under-aged and not.

1979, NOVEMBER 8TH - STEVE HARRINGTON - 13 YEARS OF AGE

Smoke drifted lazily up from the cigarette that hung between his lips, his eyes blearily resting on Carol and Tommy as they kissed loudly beside him, Carol's skirt riding up too high and exposing the pink and spotty underwear she wore underneath. Steve reached for the half-empty bottle of whiskey Tommy had nicked from beneath his older brother's bed. The other boy had grinned triumphantly when he approached them earlier in the evening, flashing open his jacket to show the amber liquid sloshing around inside. Carol had squealed out in laughter, rolling over in the grass and rising to her knees so she could pull the other boy closer to her.

Steve had drunk most of it. Carol and Tommy only sipping at it before becoming too preoccupied with one another, tongues rubbing against each other in the relative safety of the forest shrubbery.

It wasn't the first time he had been drunk, between the three of them they had enough negligent parenting to get away with stealing a bottle or two every couple of weeks or so since the beginning of the year. They'd smuggle them out of their homes and pound down the street on their bikes, giggling at danger of the act, the thrill as they roared past a cop car, the chief of police passed out in the passenger

seat on the side of the road.

Sometimes they'd drink themselves stupid, until none of them could balance on their bikes and they resigned themselves to collapsing together in a pile wherever they landed, waiting until they were sober enough to pedal home and slip in through their open windows. Whether that be at 3am or 9am. They cared little for the safety of where they landed, a small town mentality mixed with the invincibility of their youth left little concern to linger upon their minds on those nights.

Other times Steve would invite a girl along, and they'd match Carol and Tommy every step of the way, loud and messy and inexperienced and pretending they loved every second of it despite everything feeling a little gross and a little wrong.

On the rare occasion, such as tonight, Steve would come alone and Tommy and Carol would have each other, firmly intertwined, huffing and puffing and laughing and moaning. Steve didn't mind it too much. It was on these nights Steve liked to walk, leave the loving couple behind as he let the feeling of isolation wash through him, the eerie silence of the forest broken only by his light footsteps trodding through the sticks, leaves and grass.

Usually, there was no one to be found. The homeless preferred to nestle beneath the bridge near the hospital, or curl up on the local park's benches. Usually Steve didn't get this close to the road, keeping himself winding through the thick of the forest, closer to the wire fence erected in the center rather than risk being caught in the patrolling lights of a police car. Tonight was different, however. It had felt different the moment the whiskey touched Steve's lips. The minute Fran declined his offer to drink with them that morning in class.

Something was going to happen tonight. Something big and bad and scary that let the chills race through Steve faster than the alcohol could catch up to them and warm them.

He left earlier than usual, less drunk than usual, wandering in the silent woods that after a while, weren't so silent. The creaking of metal echoed throughout the forest the closer Steve moved towards

the road, the closer Steve got to a spot he knew boy's like Tommy's brother liked to take girl's like Fran's sister.

Steve wasn't sure why he did it. Why he let himself get so close so as to see through the open window of a familiar black Cadillac. Listen to the pitchy moans of a woman too young to be his mother, the grunts of a man that could be none other than his father. Watch sharp nails curl out around the open window, her pointy red tips clawing at the metal of the car and leaving red scars on the glossy black finish. Steve wondered if his father would scold her later, send her away, make her buff it out in the back parking lot of his company building in Indianapolis, fire her for her insolence.

His father groaned loudly and the girl giggled, her laugh too girlish and bright for the heaviness Steve could feel settling in his stomach, as though any second now he was going to throw up everything he'd eaten in the past month.

"You're so beautiful," His father's voice rumbled, gravely and content. The girl laughed again, her arm appearing out the window, her hand limply hanging at the end, basking in the cool air.

Steve had never heard his father call his mother beautiful.

Not once.

"I don't know what I did to deserve you," his father continued, he could hear the wet, suckling noise he so often attributed to Carol and Tommy, the same noise he knew Carol and Tommy would be making back with the stolen bottle of whiskey.

The girl kept laughing, as though she couldn't help herself, her voice was playful and light when she spoke, nothing like his mothers cold and controlled tone, or her hysterical sobbing she had fallen into of late, "Must've been something *big*."

Steve didn't hear his father's reply, didn't care to hear it, couldn't have heard it if he tried. Instead he turned and ran, crashing through the underbrush of the forest, his stomach rolling. Behind him his father's voice had raised, angry. Scaring off any who wished to peep. Steve ignored him, running as fast as he could until he found Tommy

and Carol once again, their faces turned away from each other as they watched him fall to the leaf strewn ground, snatching at the whiskey bottle and tilting it towards the sky, the stars glittering brightly, not a single cloud present to obscure his vision. Not a single one.

Tommy's hand stopped him several seconds in, "Save some for us," He snapped, trying to pull the bottle away from the other teen. Steve held on tight, eyes watering but still glaring up at his friend who looked far less angry than he sounded, far more scared. Behind him Carol was pulling herself up, wide-eyed and shaking. Steve's glare weakened Tommy's grip and the rest of the bottle was emptied into Steve's stomach, settling too heavy and too warm, burning his throat, causing him to cough and splutter.

It wasn't long before he had thrown most of it up again. Tommy's hand rubbing his back gently, Carol holding his hair back from his face, both quiet in their comforts.

He'd sobbed into Tommy's shoulder that night, heart-wrenching sobs that had Tommy clinging tightly to the other teen, rocking them lightly back and forth, a petite girlish hand running smoothly and calmly over his shoulder blades that only left him thinking of his mother, home alone in their big empty house.

"She was *right*," he finally choked out in a slur, through his tears, muffled in Tommy's soaked shoulder, when the moon had begun to sink once more, "*she was right*."

"Who was right?" Carol asked softly, gently, her hand caressing his shoulder with far more care than she'd usually offer to him, to anyone.

"Mom," he whispered hoarsely, he pulled back slightly to try and stare at the sky, but his eyelids had long ago sunk shut, saving himself from the dizzying sight of the world spinning around him as the alcohol filtered through his bloodstream.

Carol swallowed harshly, her throat working audibly in the oppressive silence of the forest, "Right about what?"

Steve wouldn't answer her, throat closing over as he choked on another sob, and he fell into Tommy's lap, relishing in the hand that began to card through his thick hair, getting caught in the knots, quietly picking out sticks and leaves and tucking it behind his ear when it fell in front of his nose. The silence rested on each of their shoulders like boulders, forcing their minds to turn thoughts they rarely entertained over and over in their minds. Carol shifted, moving to Tommy's other side and leaning against his shoulder, watching him methodically straighten out Steve's hair, far too long for any teenage boy but Steve Harrington to manage successfully.

"Hey," Tommy says, voice too loud and sudden to be as spontaneous as he tried to sound, "remember when we were kids, and you and I would ride our bikes through here after we nicked shitty singles from the record store," Steve remained still in his lap, but his breaths still came in sharp gasps, and tears still slid down his dirt covered face, "we wouldn't even get to play them cause they'd always end up broken, and we'd bury them somewhere out here so no-one could pin it on us even though this town only has like fifteen shitty kids at a time and I'm the only asshole with more freckles than skin."

Carol giggled into Tommy's shoulder, and watched the other boy's eyes as his mind dragged him into the memory and Steve's breaths began to even out, slowly, "Remember when we'd play hide-and-seek out here, and you made me invite Carol cause you said '*two person hide-and-seek sucks*' as if three person hide-and-seek is so much better."

"And when it was my turn to count you both ran away and left me out here for three hours," Carol whined pinching Tommy's side and grinning when the other teen flinched, causing Steve to groan and bounce in Tommy's lap.

"Should'a left you forever," Tommy grunted, digging an elbow into Carol's side and laughing when she huffed, titling her head away from Tommy when he leaned in for an apology kiss.

"But we didn't," Steve mumbled, slurred and barely audible, "We came back."

"Yeah," Carol nodded, her hand reaching out to wipe the dirt from

Steve's forehead, "you did. And you laughed at Tommy when he started crying after I hit him so hard he was bleeding from both nostrils."

"That fuckin' *hurt*," grumbled Tommy, his head tilting to the side as he pouted up at Carol, batting his eyelashes sweetly and finally getting the girl to press her lips to his in a chaste kiss. When she pulled back Tommy couldn't help his dopey smile, "All better now, though."

With a roll of her eyes Carol glanced up at the sky, the inky darkness already fading to a lighter blue, threatening the coming daybreak. She ran another hand across Steve's forehead, his skin burning beneath her cool touch, before she rose to her feet, "I gotta go."

Tommy nodded, rocking his body against her leg and offering a quiet goodbye. Carol pet down the cowlicks that had formed in his hair before clambering onto her bike, the pink paint clinging to some of the rusting metal framework, and rattled out of the forest, winding skillfully through the dark trees.

"She really loves you," Steve whispered, curling up into himself. Tommy shucked off his jacket and draped it over the other teen, wishing the blanket that was strewn under the bushes nearby wasn't far too disgusting to use.

Tommy brushed a hand through Steve's hair once more, pausing when he hit small knots and began the task of untangling them, "Yeah?"

"Yeah."

'She really loves *you*, too,' were the unsaid words that settled on Tommy's tongue but never made it any further, with 'I really love you,' waiting in line just behind them. He hoped Steve knew, because Tommy didn't think he would ever be able to say it, no matter how heavily it sat in his mouth, aching to spill out.

"Don't cheat on her."

Tommy's breath caught in his chest, his sharp inhale giving away his

surprise, the way his hands stilled in their movements exposing his thoughts faster than he could ever attempt to cover them with words.

His mouth felt dry when he nodded, "I won't," Tommy promised, sincerely, honestly, having never even entertained the thought of another girl since he'd first spotted Carol when he was 10, with her ugly red hair and round, pale face. The fact that she'd slimmed down with age, tamed her hair and had mostly hidden her true temper behind passive-aggressive comments whispered into his ear, behind her hand, instead of shouted across a classroom, were only small, unexpected bonuses. The fact she still liked his freckly, pale, arrogant self was nothing short of a miracle in Tommy's eyes, and in Steve's too.

Steve and Tommy skipped school that day, Steve eventually sobering, his head pounding and assuaged only with nicotine as the pair of them burned their way through the pack Steve had pinched from the convenience store two weeks ago. They didn't talk of the night that had passed, only of their stupid shared childhood that they refused to admit they were still dragging themselves through.

When the sun was setting once more, Tommy and Steve pedaled home, Tommy adamant on following Steve to his driveway and watching the other teen slip into the dark house before he took off for his own home, hands strangling his handlebars.

Notes for the Chapter:

another one! it's quite short but...eventful lol. so i think it's okay. thanks for all the support so far!!

(btw: ik 13 seems a lil young and i, personally, was very good and didn't drink til i was like 15 at least lol, but i'm a huge nerd and i knew people when i was 13 who were my age and smoking pot SO i think it's plausible, lmao.)

Thanks again for reading~!

(also i totally stole the new description from a skin's quote i loved as an angsty lil 13 year old lmao)

6. Hopper

Summary for the Chapter:

WARNINGS: Mentioned attempted suicide, described self-harm, other mental issues that I'm not sure how to qualify.

1980, NOVEMBER 9TH - STEVE HARRINGTON - 14 YEARS OF AGE

Mrs Connors, Principal Connors wife and secretary to the man her husband envied, knocked gently on the classroom door, her head peeking around the side as she searched for Steve, her stern voice calling out his name in a manner Steve had never heard before. Kind and careful, as though saying his name too loud would shatter him completely.

The boys around him starting laughing, banging their hands on their desks and crowing up at him, "King Steve's in trouble." They were only silenced by Mrs May slamming her hand against her own desk, standing quickly and glaring down at the class.

Steve rose to his feet, already halfway to the door when Mrs Connors asked him to collect his things. He wouldn't be coming back today.

Steve couldn't help but let his mind panic, thinking of all the things he'd done in the past couple of months that could land him in such severe trouble. That he'd be receiving more than a harsh word from Principal Harvey that would last half an hour at most. Perhaps they'd been caught in their late night binge drinking efforts, or the liquor store attendant had ratted them out for using Carol's older cousins' ID. Or maybe they'd found out that the melted puddle of plastic on the asphalt outside had been his and Tommy's lunatic arson attempts on the school in the early mornings.

As he reached the end of the hall, his bag slung over his shoulders, hands shoved into his jacket pockets, shooting Tina from the year above a leering grin as she passed on her way to the bathroom, Steve thought maybe they'd finally found out about all the stolen cigarettes. The criminal aspect of his wrongdoings leaping further forward when he spotted the new Chief standing in the doorway, arms crossed tightly over his chest, foot tapping restlessly.

The Chief had already signed him out and Steve was being led to the looming police truck, the one he'd flown past on his bike countless times smuggling by alcohol or cigarettes or weed. It was probably the weed that had landed him in this situation now, the smell was less than subtle and they had never been very careful. He'd had to shove the grams left in his locker between the pages of the English textbook they'd finished analysing months ago, pushing it deep within his locker, hidden behind piles of unused textbooks and unwashed gym clothes.

In the truck, it was tense and silent, the Chief ('Hopper' the man had introduced himself gruffly, briefly, before returning the car to silence) hadn't provided him with any information as to why he was being pulled from school or where he was going. Steve couldn't help but grow antsy in his seat, shifting the positioning of his legs and picking at his jeans, resting his elbow against the armrest and staring out the side window only to shift a second later and lean back against the leather seats, feigning an air of casualty.

Hopper's own hands twitched on the steering wheel, tightening and loosening every few seconds before he finally gave in and pulled a cigarette from the pack in the pocket on the left breast of his shirt. He lit one carefully, stared blankly out at the road for a moment, then passed it to Steve before lighting a second and drawing down the nicotine like it was air.

Steve was puzzled, to say the least, that the Chief of Police was encouraging underage smoking, but was also the last person to look a gift horse in the mouth, and stuck the cigarette between his lips anyway.

The truck didn't stop until they were at the hospital.

"What the fuck?" Steve couldn't keep to himself, the Chief's eyes glancing down at him sharply, almost scolding him but thinking better of it at the last moment.

"There's been an...incident." Hopper tried, swallowing thickly, tapping his fingers on the wheel, "Your mother's inside. We can't reach your father just yet so you'll have to wait until he gets here to go anywhere."

"Can't I go home?" Steve questioned, sucking in a sharp breath as the implications crashed through his mind, "I mean after I see her. Can't I go home after?"

"No." Hopper shook his head, pursing his lips, his voice was rough and broken from years of smoking, Steve hoped he wouldn't sound as bad, "There's a lot of clean-up."

"Clean-up?" Steve asked weakly, wishing he hadn't been so quick to finish his cigarette, glad he had thought to keep a pack in his bag, "What was there to clean-up?"

Hopper pinched his beard between his knuckles, tugging at the hair, stalling, "Harrington. Steve. Your mother, she tried to kill herself." Steve bit his lip, lowering his head enough so that his hair would swoop down and cover his eyes to keep Hopper from his sight.

"Oh."

The silence that followed was thicker than it had been on the way there, thicker even than when the smoke had filled the cabin of the truck earlier when neither of them had moved to roll down a window.

"Did she...?"

"No. She's alive."

Steve didn't know if he should find that comforting. Doesn't know if that's the good outcome in this scenario. He supposes it is. Supposes he should feel relieved at the news. He doesn't.

"They know you're coming. They'll let you know when your father gets contacted," Hopper told him, his hand moved as though to touch Steve, as though to rub against his arm comfortingly. Steve jerked open the door and slid out before he could, pulling his backpack over his shoulders and nodding at the Chief politely before turning and walking into the hospital. Ignoring the sound of a truck, loitering on the side of the footpath until he had walked through the glass doors.

A hospital is full of noises, crying and moaning, none of the fun kind, the beeping of the equipment, the chatter of the nurses, cautious chuckles of a family crowding around a bedside, urgent announcements ringing through the hospital in a variety of codes that

had doctors and nurses jogging this way and that. No one stopped to look at him, sitting in a single chair outside a room that had its blinds firmly drawn. The nurse who had been inside, the one who had guided him to his mother's bedside, had said he could stay there if he wanted to. He didn't.

He couldn't look down at his mother for longer than a second, her usually bright, pale, porcelain skin sallow against the hospital sheets. Her arms were laid by her sides, the nurse had been changing her bandages when he arrived and he saw one long line cut into her flesh, from wrist to elbow, on either arm. Her skin as white as the tablecloth she set each of his dinners' down upon, the cuts as red as the nail that had sliced them so easily in his dream as a child, that had marred his father's black Cadillac so easily.

He left soon after, before she could finish redressing her arms, falling down into the seat just outside her room, hugging his backpack to his chest.

Steve hated her. He hated her red-rimmed eyes and wine-scented breath, hated the way she would pick fights that didn't need to be picked, hated how she tugged and pulled at his father, her husband, begging him to admit his infidelity despite knowing, wholeheartedly, that she was right, and yet refusing to leave him. He hated how she sobbed, loudly and brokenly in the halls, how she would fall into his bed and curl around him, clinging to him and whispering her 'I love you's' into his ear, petting his hair and kissing the crown of his head, like he was still a child that she could cradle in her arms.

He hated that she could drive, but didn't have the car to take her anywhere. That his father had caged her in a beautiful, glittering prison and taken the keys. His father had given her a pool, and an exercise machine, a bar and a kitchen, a cleaner and a pool boy and yet he had never given her a car. Never let her wander far from the pristine white walls that he'd bought for her, and yet sneered that she was entrapping herself. Sneered down at the woman he'd married and scorned her for never taking a step into the outside world, when

he was the one who had driven her out to the forest's edge, given her everything she needed to stay alive and left her there.

Steve knew that without his father, his mother could do nothing. Her trips to the grocery store were always arranged by his father, a car would appear at the appropriate time of day and his mother would slip inside, she'd disappear into the grocers and smile politely at the people who had once seen her roam the town of Hawkin's in her youth with reckless abandon, and slink quietly into the car, idling outside, waiting for her to return to the prison he had built for her, she had built for herself.

"I want a job, Steve," she'd sobbed into his neck one evening, when Steve lay stiff as a board between his own sheets, his mother's arms wrapped around his waist as she snivelled into his shoulder, "I need something to do, Steve, anything."

Those nights were painful, something Steve had never enjoyed and in fact dreaded when he slipped through the front door well after the sun had set and the streetlights had begun to illuminate the streets in town, to the sound of old records blaring through the speakers. Nothing bad ever happened, nothing inappropriate or wrong, nothing to mention to the school counsellor who seemed to watch him, Carol and Tommy like a vulture, circling its prey. Those nights were merely a woman who had been isolated for so long, abandoned in a house meant for many that held only herself and her son, left to her own devices with nothing to work for, nothing to do, simply exist.

"I don't know what to do, Steve," she'd always told him, her breath reeked, her grip far tighter than it would have been when she was sober, "This house is so big, so empty."

His mother was a lonely woman, abandoned, isolated, and clinging to her youth. Bored and left with nothing to do but claw through each empty day as though there was something better to see when the sun rose again. As though anything would improve or change if she simply closed her eyes and waited.

Steve couldn't say that he'd seen this coming, not sitting here in this hospital specifically, hugging his bag to his chest, his knee bouncing furiously as he blinked back tears and stared at the pamphlet and poster filled hospital walls, but he had expected something to change. His mother had craved it, needed it, was desperate for it. If this was the change she so desired, who was Steve to stop her?

He didn't know how long he was there before the same nurse crouched down in front of him again, her eyes soft and sympathetic, kind and looking at him the way a mother should look at her son, the way his mother never really has, always relying on him for comfort, "Your father's out of the country at the moment, he can't get back until next week. Did you know that?"

Steve shook his head, he didn't know that, he didn't really care what his father did these days.

"I'm so sorry, sweetie." Her hand reached out to rub at his arm and Steve flinched back, biting his lip, the nurse pulled her hand back and smiled a sad, tight smile, "He said he'd make arrangements from where he is now, he said you could go to your aunts but he didn't give us a number, do you know it?"

Steve nodded, he didn't know it but he knew Tommy's dad's number and Tommy's dad would lie for him, would agree instantly that he was a relative of Mr Harrington without hesitating for a second. He was more eager to have him as a son than his own father sometimes.

Tommy's dad picked him up within 10 minutes of the hospital's call, meeting him in the hallway and forcing the teen into a tight hug, a hug that Steve tried and failed to struggle out of.

Tommy himself was in the car, restlessly bouncing his leg in the backseat, Carol was waiting outside, the door open as she leant against it, smoke pouring from her mouth. Steve was pushed into the backseat, his head falling against Tommy's shoulder, Carol's arms wrapped around his waist and Tommy's grabbing at his arm as Steve began to shake and shudder with the force of his sobs, his face

buried in Tommy's neck. Tommy's dad reached back and placed a hand on his knee, squeezing it as he drove and Steve's sobs only grew louder.

By the time they'd made it back to Tommy's house, Steve was wailing, clinging so tightly to Tommy the boy almost crumpled under Steve's weight. Carol, strong and beautiful Carol, was beside him, her lithe arms lifting them both, guiding them into Tommy's house and into Tommy's room, pushing them both onto Tommy's bed and curling herself around him, her hair soft and her breath reeking of cigarette smoke.

She whispered nice things in his ear, sweet things, promises she shouldn't and couldn't make. Tommy didn't say a word, only holding to Steve tighter and tighter. A silent promise that he'd always be there, that Steve could always cling to him.

The Harrington residence remained empty for months to come.

Notes for the Chapter:

I'm back!! Sorry it took me forever, this was actually written I just...hated it lol. I'm still unsure about it, I think it's too dramatic but I think I'm just gonna let you guys decide whether you like it or not :) Thanks again for all the lovely comments and kudos and bookmarks, I really, really, do appreciate it!! Hopefully the next chapter should come around a lil sooner (altho it will be possibly even MORE dramatic which...seems impossible lol).

Thanks again!!!